

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES

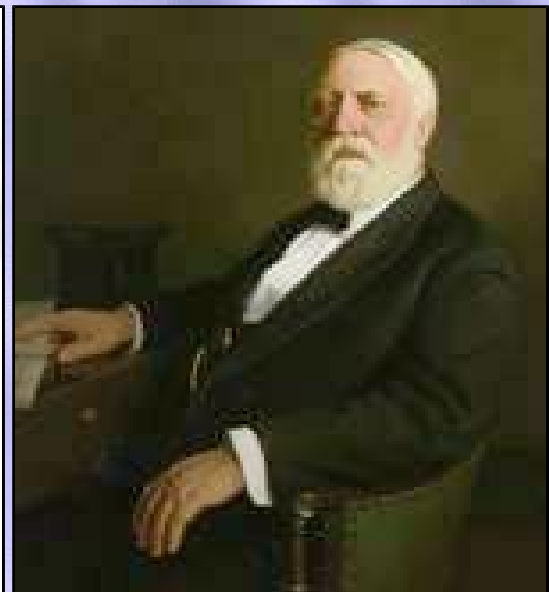
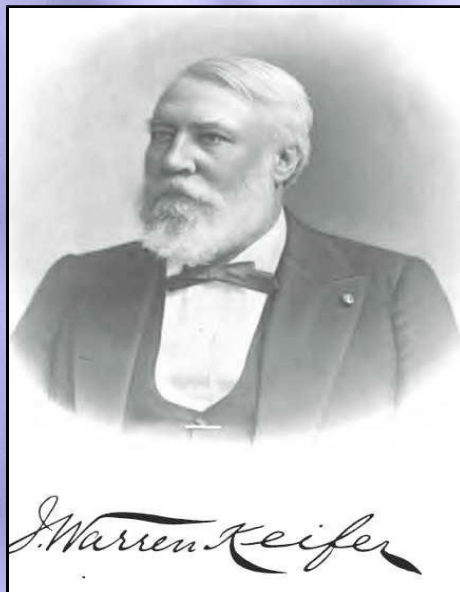


*Loyal Legion Vignettes*



**MAJOR GENERAL JOSEPH WARREN KEIFER USV (Spanish American War)  
BVT MG, BVT BG USV, COLONEL OHIO INFANTRY USV (Civil War)  
(1836 Ohio – 1932 Ohio)  
Original Companion, Ohio Commandery, Insignia Number 2484**

**By  
Douglas Reed Niermeyer, Past Commander-in-Chief  
Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States  
November 2009**



**Major General Joseph Warren Keifer, USV**

(Left: Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals and Soldiers, by Whitelaw Reid, c1895  
Middle: History of the Republican Party in Ohio, by Joseph Patterson Smith, c1898  
Right: Oil on canvas, Charles A. Gray, 1912, Collection of U.S. House of Representatives)

**JOSEPH WARREN KEIFER, soldier, lawyer, and statesman. There are few names amongst the many illustrious men of Ohio that stand forth more prominent than that of Joseph Warren Keifer. A true son of a great state, he has manfully fought the battle of life and won honors for his state and for his name on the battlefield, in the forum and on the floor of Congress. He descended from an ancestry inured to the hardships of**

life on the border and he has grown with the state until his name and fame are indelibly engraved upon the roll of honor in the archives of the nation, as soldier and statesman.

His father, Joseph Keifer, was born at Sharpsburg, Maryland, December 28, 1784. He was a civil engineer and farmer, and came to Ohio in 1812, settling in Clark County, where he died April 13, 1850. The wife of Joseph Keifer and mother of Joseph Warren Keifer was Mary (Smith) Keifer, born at Columbia, on Duck creek, now in Hamilton County, Ohio, January 31, 1799. She was descended from sturdy English stock, emigrating to the Northwest Territory from New Jersey about 1790, and she died at Yellow Springs, Ohio, March 23, 1879.

Joseph Warren Keifer was born on Mad River, Clark County, Ohio, January 30, 1836, and grew to manhood within his native county, a son of the people, imbued with the spirit of liberty and equality which life on the farm amidst surroundings of an historic character are likely to awaken. In the possession of his family was the battlefield where was fought one of the battles with the Indians in the struggle which achieved the independence of the great northwest and broke forever the power of the Indian tribes. The birthplace of the great Indian warrior, Tecumseh, was the farm of John Keifer, his cousin, and from early boyhood, it had been his pleasure to roam over the country and to locate the points connected with the early wars of the pioneers in their struggle to redeem the wilderness.

He attended the common schools and Antioch College, and taught a term of the county school in 1853, seeking, meanwhile, in every accessible channel, the means of self-improvement and education. He early determined to make the pursuit of the law his life work, and while attending to his duties on the farm, for three years up to 1856, he read law and acquired such other general information as books within his reach afforded him. In 1856, he entered the office of Anthony & Goode, lawyers of Springfield, and was admitted to the bar January 12, 1858, entering at once upon the practice.

General Keifer's early associations and education all tended to enlist his sympathy in the cause of the down trodden and oppressed; his love of country and of liberty to attach him strongly to the state and his nation; on the opening of the war he was pronounced in his advocacy of the union of the states as an indissoluble bond, and on April 19, 1861, he enlisted in the army to fight for the maintenance of the government. His military career was long and brilliant. Our brief space forbids more than a summary of the events in which he was a participant. He was commissioned Major of the Third Ohio Infantry, April 27, 1861, for three months, and June 12, 1861, for three years. He took part in the Battle of Rich Mountain July 11, 1861, the first of the war; the same year he participated in engagements in Cheat Mountain and Elk Water, West Virginia; in November his regiment was attached to General Buell's army; February 12, 1862, he was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of his regiment and was present at the capture of Bowling Green, Kentucky; Nashville, Tennessee, and Huntsville and Bridgeport, Alabama. April 30, 1862, he led the first expedition into Georgia and performed an important service in the destruction of the saltpeter works at Nickajack Cave. He returned to Louisville with General Buell's command; was made Colonel of the 110th Ohio Infantry September 30, 1862; was assigned to General Milroy's division in West Virginia, and placed in command of a brigade and the post at Moorefield; was in the battle of Winchester, Virginia, June, 1863, where he was twice wounded; July 9, 1863, he was assigned to the Army of the Potomac in the Third Army Corps in pursuit of General Lee's army, and took part in engagements at Wapping Heights July 23, 1863; in August, 1863, he was sent with his command to aid in the suppression of the draft riots and in enforcing the draft in New York city and Brooklyn; rejoined the army in the field in September and bore a prominent part in the battle of Mine Run, November 27, 1863, and in other minor engagements; March 24, 1864, he was transferred to the Sixth Army Corps, and at the Battle of the Wilderness, May 5, 1864, was wounded by a musket ball which shattered both bones of his left forearm, disabling him until August 26, when he resumed command of his brigade at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, being the Second Brigade, Third Division, Sixth Army Corps, and with his arm still in a sling commanded his troops in the hard fought battles of Opequan, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar creek in the Shenandoah Valley; at Opequan he was wounded by a shell, his horse being shot under him; at Fisher's Hill he, without orders, led his brigade in the assault on the fortified left flank of the enemy and captured many prisoners and guns; at Cedar creek he commanded the Third Division, Sixth Army Corps, and for his distinguished gallantry and the energy and discretion there evinced was brevetted a brigadier general; in December, 1864, with his corps he rejoined the Army of the Potomac in front of Petersburg and was actively engaged on the left of the fortified line; March 25, 1865, he led a successful assault upon the enemy's outer line of works and was complimented in general orders; April 2, he charged with his division in the final assault which carried the main works and resulted in the capture of Petersburg and Richmond; April 5 his command aided in cutting off the retreat of Lee's army and forced it to give battle on the 6th at Sailor's creek; the wings of the army (General Keifer commanding the left) being forced forward (notwithstanding the fact that the enemy had broken the center line), surrounded and effected the

capture of above six thousand of the enemy, including Generals Ewell, Kershaw, Custis, Lee, Pickett, and other officers of high rank.

One of the incidents of the war, thrilling and full of adventure and showing the true spirit of military heroism and presence of mind, is worthy of presentation here. Immediately succeeding the surrender of the six thousand Confederates, and while assisting in the reformation of the troops, information reached General Keifer that a body of the enemy was concealed in a wood on his right. He rode in person into the woods to reconnoiter and came suddenly upon the Confederate troops lying on the ground, evidently ignorant of the surrender that had just taken place. The density of the wood, approaching night and the smoke of the battle saved the General from instant identification as a Union officer. To attempt to withdraw was instant death, and surrender never entered his mind. Seeing that the troops were awaiting and expecting a command he rode forward and wheeling his horse shouted, "Forward!" and led the enemy as his own troops, waving his sword toward the recent scene of battle. The command was instantly obeyed and the faster he rode the faster the enemy followed after, until the edge of the wood and the clear air led to the discovery of his identity, when he was the mark for many muskets, and would have been shot but for the command of the Confederate officers, who prevented their men from delivering their fire. General Keifer escaped to his own troops and leading them in a charge upon the enemy secured the surrender of the entire brigade of Confederates, which was composed of marines little used to land service, commanded by Commodore J. R. Tucker and Captain John D. Semmes. Tucker and Semmes both claimed to have saved General Keifer's life by preventing their troops from firing upon him, and as an act of gratitude he used his influence to obtain the parole from Johnson's Island of these officers, who, having deserted from the United States Navy, were not entitled, under then existing orders, to that clemency.

General Keifer joined in the pursuit and capture of General Lee's army, and was brevetted Major General "for gallant and distinguished services during the campaign ending in the surrender of the insurgent commander, General R. E. Lee." His corps was sent south to aid in the capture of General Johnston's army in North Carolina, and learning at Danville of the contemplated surrender, he, with a portion of his staff, pushed across the country 50 miles to witness it. He was thus present at the capitulation of both Generals Lee's and Johnston's armies.

A career beginning in April 1861 and closing June 27, 1865, when he retired from the army to resume the practice of law at Springfield, briefly outlined, has but few parallels; without military education or experience, without influence or wealth, merit and distinguished ability earned the highest rank in the service. For over four years he was, except when disabled from wounds, in active service in the field and in the front. His purpose in entering the army—the preservation of the Union—was accomplished, his life work in arts of peace was before him and upon it; he entered with the same energy and enthusiasm that had made his military career so glorious.

His return to civil life was followed by success at the bar, where he soon acquired an extensive practice. November 30, 1866, he was tendered a commission as Lieutenant Colonel of the 26th United States Infantry upon the unsolicited recommendations of Generals Grant and Meade, but declined it.

He was elected to the Ohio State Senate, holding office from 1868 to 1870; he served on the committees on judiciary and municipal corporations, and was the author of a number of bills. One, being an amendment to the replevin law, providing special safeguards for heirlooms and other property not possessing a general marketable value, has since been adopted in many other states. Also one, limiting the right of the husband in wife's estate under certain circumstances, has been highly commended, and with additional clauses has remained a valuable statute of the state. He was an active participant in the debates, vigilant and untiring in his attention to the duties of his office.

In 1876, the General was a delegate to the national Republican Convention and was elected to Congress the same year for a term beginning March 4, 1877, and by re-election continued a member until March 4, 1885, when he retired from public service and has not since held office, but has been devoted to the pursuit of his profession. His career in Congress was highly creditable to him and to his state, for he achieved a distinction that comes to but few men. He was an active participant in the debates of Congress and a leader in the councils of his party. In recognition of his eminent services, the Republican majority in the house elected him, December 5, 1881, speaker of the 47th Congress. He held the office until March 4, 1883. General Keifer enjoys the distinction of having been the first speaker to enforce the rule of cloture, his ruling having been adopted in the house giving to the speaker the right to close debate and cut off purposely-obstructive motions and questions.

He is the only Ohioan who has been made speaker of the house, and entered on the office at a period when the Democrats had been in a majority for six years; following the expiration of his term, the Democrats were again

in power and the speaker's chair was filled by John G. Carlisle of Kentucky. The first Republican speaker to succeed General Keifer was Thomas B. Reed in the 50th Congress, his immediate Republican predecessor being James G. Blaine.

Amongst those with whom General Keifer served in Congress and who were members of the 47th session (of which he was speaker) and who gave him their support were George R. Davis, Charles B. Farwell, and Joseph G. Cannon, of Illinois; Thomas B. Reed and Nelson Dingley, Jr. of Maine; Julius C. Burrows of Michigan; Benjamin Butterworth and William McKinley, Jr. of Ohio, who were at that time men of renown in the party.

During General Keifer's service in Congress many important measures were under consideration, and during the pendency of the long contest on the part of the Democracy to withhold the appropriations from the army, in the attempt to abridge the power of the executive to enforce order and legal elections, he took a foremost part in upholding the authority of the president and in withstanding these assaults on the constitutional and rightful use of the military and naval forces to keep the peace at the polls on election days. It was his position on this question, his pronounced views, and the able manner of presenting the subject, which won the admiration of his fellow Republican Congressmen. His ability as a parliamentarian and his impartial enforcement of the rules of the house have never been surpassed by any one in that high office. He took the first step toward overthrowing the old practice of allowing a minority to prevent action by the house on pending measures by dilatory motions and refusing to vote to prevent a quorum. He ruled such motions out of order (May 29, 1882), pending a proposition to amend the rules of the house to allow it to consider contested election cases. He was then in favor of counting a quorum if found present but refusing to vote. In this latter he was in advance of his party leaders, Mr. Reed among the number. No parliamentary decision of his was overruled by the house, though many appeals from his rulings were taken and party feeling ran high in the 47th Congress. The passing of his party from power at the next Congress elevated John G. Carlisle to the speaker's chair, as the representative of the Democratic Party.

In May 1887, General Keifer was the orator on the unveiling of the Garfield statue at Washington. He was Commander of the Department of Ohio, Grand Army of the Republic, 1868-70; Vice-Commander-in-Chief of that organization, 1872-3; a trustee of the Ohio Soldiers' Orphans' Home from April 15, 1870 to March 5, 1878, which institution he was chiefly instrumental in establishing while Department Commander; he has been since 1873 a trustee of Antioch College, and from 1873 he has held the office of president of the Lagonda National Bank, of Springfield, Ohio, except during a brief period while necessarily absent, when he resigned the position of President and became Vice President.

In every position which he has held General Keifer has been true to the trust reposed in him. Always a Republican, strong in his love for the principles espoused by his party, he has ever been bold and outspoken. He has been a bulwark in time of trouble, a very Samson in his deeds for the upholding of his party banner, and has led many a hard-fought political contest, as he did at the front, with his sword in hand, in the struggle on the battlefield. General Keifer's enthusiastic support of Republican principles never wavered. In the grand contest of 1896, he was again in the field and took an active part in the canvass, which resulted so triumphantly, speaking in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. He was called to Chicago and there made a number of addresses, helping materially to increase the vote for sound money and sound Republican doctrine.

Joseph Warren Keifer was elected an Original Companion of the Ohio Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) on April 5, 1882, Insignia #2484 and as a member, he authored three MOLLUS War Papers:

*The Battle of Sailor's Creek (OHv3),  
The Battle of Rich Mountain and Some Incidents (OHv7), and  
Experiences and Observations of the Present European War (OHv9).*

Keifer returned to military service during the Spanish-American War when President William McKinley appointed him Major General on June 9, 1898. He commanded the 7th Army Corps and the American forces that marched into Havana after Spanish forces withdrew on January 1, 1899. He returned to private life on May 12. Keifer again became active in veterans' affairs, serving as the first Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish American War Veterans from 1900 to 1901 and in 1903 and 1904 as the Commander of the MOLLUS Ohio Commandery.

In 1904, Keifer returned to Congress, where he remained until his defeat in 1910. He was also a delegate to the 1908 national convention. He championed some of the same issues that had concerned him before. In particular,

he criticized southern states' disfranchisement of blacks and argued that they should, as a result, have their representation reduced. Like a number of Civil War veterans active in politics after 1900, Keifer was a strong advocate of peace. While celebrating the causes for which he had fought, he believed that war had grown too deadly and awful to be permitted any longer.

Following his final electoral defeat in 1910, Keifer returned to Springfield, continuing his legal practice with two of his three sons until 1923. A life member of the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society, he was the author of various historical and literary studies. Keifer died April 22, 1932 in Springfield, Ohio and is buried in the Ferncliff Cemetery in Springfield, Ohio.

General Keifer was married March 22, 1860, to Miss Eliza Stout (1834 - 1899) of Springfield, Ohio, a lady whose courage, intelligence and love has sustained him in the trying days of war and the prosperity of peace.

They had three sons (see below) and one daughter, Margaret Eliza, who died in 1890. The Keifer family has had four generations as Companions in the MOLLUS:

*Sons:*

Joseph Warren Keifer Jr. (1861 – 1954) NE#10182, a farmer in Nebraska;

William White Keifer (1866 - 1963) OH#17395, active partner with his father and brother in the practice; of law at Springfield, Ohio.

*In Memoriam: William W. Keifer died December 16, 1963, Companion Keifer, Commander of the OH Commandery since 1959 was an attorney. He held many offices during his life and was well known in all circles. His father was the late Gen. Keifer who gained prominence in both the Civil and Spanish American Wars. His loyalty and devotion and cheerful smile will be missed by his Companions from Ohio (Source: Loyal Legion Bulletin January, 1964 Vol.21, No.1); and*

Captain Horace Charles Keifer (1867 – 1918) Company B, 3rd U.S. Volunteer Engineers (Spanish American War), OH#17396, active partner with his father and brother in the practice of law at Springfield, Ohio.

*Grandsons:*

Joseph William Keifer Sr. (1887 – 1973) NE#20057, and  
Lieutenant Oswin Keifer (1893 – 1978) NE#20059.

*Great-Grandsons:*

Dr. John Ernest Bell Jr. (b: 1925) NE#20056;

Samuel Doak Bell, (b: 1933) NE#20225;

Warren James Bell (b: 1928) NE#20226;

John Robert Keifer (b: ?) NE#20468;

Joseph William Keifer Jr. (1927 - 1999) NE#20058;

Captain Oswin Keifer Jr. (1920 – 1999) NE#20060;

Dr. Fred Warren McLafferty (b: 1923) NE#20046; and

Dr. Charles Lowry McLafferty (b: 1927) NE#20045.

**Sources:**

1) Membership Records of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

2) *History of the Republican Party in Ohio*, edited by Joseph Patterson Smith, c1898, p.720-723

3) *The Ohio Judicial Center, Biography of Joseph Warren Keifer (Jan. 30, 1836 - April 22, 1932)*

[http://www.ohiojudicialcenter.gov/j\\_w\\_keifer.asp](http://www.ohiojudicialcenter.gov/j_w_keifer.asp)

4) *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774 to Present: Joseph Warren Keifer*

<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000048>

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Descendants of Major General Joseph Warren Keifer are eligible for hereditary membership in the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS - founded by Civil War officers on April 15, 1865) and the Dames of the Loyal Legion of the United States (founded in 1899 as the auxiliary to the MOLLUS). For more information on either or both organizations, please visit each organization's national website:

[Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States](#)

[Dames of the Loyal Legion of the United States](#)

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